

A group of people are walking away from the camera on a wooden boardwalk that leads through a vast, grassy field. The people are dressed in casual outdoor attire. The background shows a line of trees under a clear sky. The entire image has a blue-green color overlay.

south
mountain
COMPANY

15 RED ARROW ROAD • P.O. BOX 1260 WEST TISBURY, MA 02575
TEL 508.693.4850 • SOUTHMOUNTAIN.COM

Path to Ownership Program

Our Path to The Path

South Mountain transitioned from a sole proprietorship to a worker-owned cooperative in 1987. It was a dramatic hinge point in the history of the company, changing our culture – and our very DNA – overnight!

Recently, we noticed a gap in the ownership continuum. We did a great job extolling its benefits in our recruitment materials, and we did a great job of delivering on those promises after employees bought in, but for the five years between hiring and eligibility, there were few touchpoints.

Filling this gap presented a real opportunity. Inspired by the work of Jenn Briggs and her team at New Belgium Brewing Company, we created an ownership curriculum with two goals:

1. To develop active and engaged SMC Owners
2. To strengthen our relationships with each other and with the company

It's called the Path to Ownership.

We chose the “path” metaphor for the following reasons: It has a clear beginning, can meander, has progress markers along the way, a guide when necessary, and a reward at the end.

The following “Trail map” is a physical manifestation of the path. It is the size and style of a national park passport and works along the same lines. Each experience is initialed upon completion until there are none left.

Experiences are dispersed among six levels: Basecamp, Setting Out, Exploring, Practicing, Achieving, and Mastering. The full program involves 34 hours spread over seven years. (Five years pre-eligibility + 2 years getting settled after buying in!)

Fifteen longtime employees act as “guides,” working closely with our Communications Coordinator to develop and present an hour-long “experience” centered on a particular aspect of our work.

Half the curriculum is experienced as a group; the other half is experienced individually. Many experiences are lecture style, while others are more hands-on (like visiting job sites, immersing oneself in a specific department's workflow, attending a meeting or event, etc.)

Two years in, The Path has made unmistakable impact: Attendance at Owners meetings (mandatory to Owners but open to all) has surged. What used to be one-way report-outs of our financials and work mix have become forums for rich back-and-forth. There's more cross-department pollination, and camaraderie is at an all-time high.

We'll never know exactly what the future holds for South Mountain, but with a bench of 20 informed, engaged, and aligned upcoming owners, we're as ready as we can be!

Might your business benefit from a similar system?

PATH TO

Worker Ownership

NAME

FIRST DAY AT SMCO

- -

FIRST DAY AS AN OWNER

- -

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Worker Ownership is in our DNA.

IT IS THE FOUNDATION of our structure, our decision-making and the rich, reciprocal relationships we share with one another. We hire with Ownership in mind. *We hired you because we think you will make a terrific Owner one day!*

Now that you're settled in, the work begins.

WE'VE CHOSEN "PATH" as the metaphor for this program because it has a clear beginning, can meander, has progress markers along the way, a guide when necessary, and a reward at the end.

Approximately half of the miles ahead will be traveled alongside those who were hired around the same time. The other half, you'll undertake alone. Longtime employees, who once tread the same ground, will show you the way.

The "Trail Map" you're holding is a physical manifestation of the path. It will function in the style of a National Park passport, with each experience stamped upon completion. There are six legs in total (shown to right).

We've taken extra care in the Trail Map's printing/binding to ensure it survives seven years in your pack, 30 years in a drawer somewhere, and a final appearance at your retirement celebration.

The time will go by in the blink of an eye.

Between now and then, enjoy the journey.

MONTHS 1-3
Basecamp

YEARS 1-3
Setting Out

YEARS 1-3
Exploring

YEARS 4 & 5
Practicing

YEARS 5 & 6
Achieving

YEARS 7+
Mastering

MONTHS 1-3

Basecamp

Pack the essentials and meet your trail mates.

START HERE



WELCOME	OPERATING POLICIES
COMMUNICATIONS	DATE WITH DEIRDRE
EVALS+ PROF DEV + PROF OUTREACH	





YEARS 1-3

Setting Out

This leg of the journey is about learning the lay of the land. Notice patterns, ask questions, orient yourself.



OUR HISTORY	STRATEGIC PLANNING
PROJECT TOUR	ALL UNDER ONE ROOF
PRODUCTIVE MEETINGS	



YEARS 1 - 3

Exploring

You'll cover more ground in this leg than any other. Lean in. Adjust for different types of terrain. Press on.



WHO WE ARE

FUNCOM	THE BOARD (OWNERSHIP & GOVERNANCE 101)
LUNCH SWAP	THE SHOP

WHAT GUIDES US

WORKER OWNERSHIP	TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE
OPEN BOOK MANAGEMENT	PHILANTHROPY
AFFORDABLE HOUSING	SAFETY

WHAT WE DO

ARCHITECTURE & ENGINEERING	BUILDING
INTERIORS	ENERGY TECHNOLOGY

YEARS 4&5

Practicing

You're a seasoned traveler now. Time to test your skills at higher altitudes!

Act with intention.




PLAN FOR OWNERSHIP	WRITE A LETTER
OBSERVE AN OWNERS MEETING	JOIN A COMMITTEE
LEAD AN INITIATIVE	

YEARS 5&6

Achieving

Welcome to the summit.
The tree line is receding to allow for some views. You should be feeling a sense of accomplishment and energy for the final stretch. Don't rush it.



BECOME AN OWNER
ROTATE ON TO THE BOARD
PAY OFF YOUR OWNERSHIP BALANCE

YEARS 7+

Mastering

Take a deep breath.

Reflect on all you've accomplished.

Linger as long as you'd like.

When you're ready, turn around and
help the next group up. Be their guide.

The cycle continues.





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